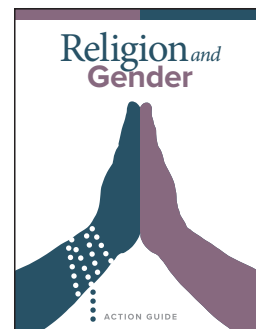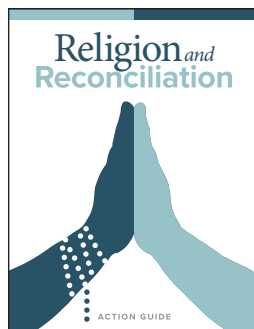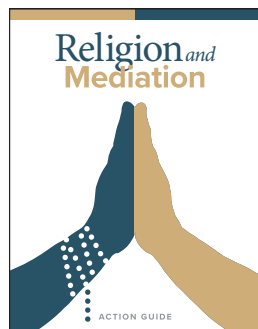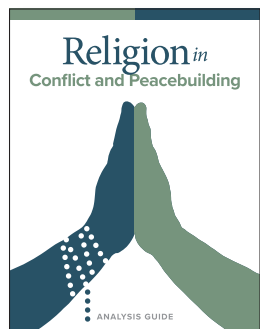# Religion *in* Conflict and Peacebuilding

ANALYSIS GUIDE

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Getting Started

THIS IS A SUMMARY of the *Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding Analysis Guide,* which is written for people working to address violent conflicts where religion plays a role in the conflict or can play a role in peacebuilding. It provides guidance on how to understand and act upon the religious dimensions of conflict and peacebuilding. It is one of four Action Guides; the others are *Religion and Mediation, Religion and Reconciliation,* and *Religion and Gender.*

Understanding Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding

Religion can be understood as a human response to a perceived nonphysical reality concerning the origin, meaning, and purpose of life. It is typically organized by communities into a shared system of symbols, rituals, institutions, and practices.

Five interrelated dimensions of religion can be relevant for conflict and peacebuilding:

- **Religion as a set of ideas:** A shared set of teachings, doctrine, norms, values, stories, and narratives that together provide a framework for understanding and acting in the world
- **Religion as community:** A defined group of followers and believers that provides individuals with a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves
- **Religion as an institution:** The formal structures, leaders, and organizations associated with religious communities

- **Religion as a set of symbols and practices:** The many visible, lived manifestations of a religion from buildings to dress to ceremonies and rituals
- **Religion as spirituality:** A personal experience that provides a sense of purpose and connectedness to something greater than oneself, as well as a powerful source of motivation

Consider all five dimensions when undertaking peacebuilding and be aware that religion can act as both a divider (a source of conflict) and a connector (a source of peace) in a conflict. The questions in this Guide invite you to think about how the different dimensions of religion can be both dividers and connectors.

In the first sections of the Analysis Guide you will find more information on understanding religion in conflict, guiding principles, and data collection.

How to Use The Guide

The Guide should act like a filter that captures the important elements of the conflict that are related to religion and shows you how they are relevant to peacebuilding efforts. The Guide presents a five-step process, outlined in figure 1, that includes asking where, who, what, why, when, and how at each step (table 1).

FIGURE 1. **The five-step process**

TABLE 1: **Key questions to consider at each step of the process**

WHERE?	Geographic and social location; social location is the position people hold in their community as a function of their gender, race, class, age, ability, religion, and other characteristics that relate to power and privilege
WHAT?	Factors and issues that are contributing to conflict and peacebuilding
WHO?	Actors, their characteristics, and their attributes
WHY?	Motivations: why actors behave the way they do
WHEN?	The conflict over time
HOW?	The use of power and resources to achieve goals

The key to a good conflict analysis is asking the right questions. The Quick Reference Table combines the five steps with key questions to lead you through an analysis of religion's role in conflict and peacebuilding. The questions are divided into two types:

- General conflict analysis questions (represented by black text)
- Questions that focus more specifically on the religious dimension of conflict and peacebuilding (represented by *red italic text*)

Quick Reference Chart

QUESTION TO CONSIDER	STEP 1 Self-Reflect	STEP 2 Understand the Context	STEP 3 Analyze the Conflict	STEP 4 Map Peacebuilding	STEP 5 Turn Analysis into Action
WHERE? Geographic and social location Social location is the position people hold in their community as a function of their gender, race, class, age, ability, religion, and other characteristics that relate to power and privilege	Where have you been working and what do you already know about the context? *Where does your knowledge of the society, religion, and culture come from and what do you know about the context that will help you with your conflict analysis?*	Where is the conflict located within the wider geographic and demographic context? *Which geographic areas have particular religious significance?* *How does religious identity shape the structure of society?*	Where is the conflict taking place and who is affected? *What areas of religious significance overlap with areas of conflict?* *What is the religious identity of the social groups affected by the conflict?*	Where, and with which sections of society, are peacebuilding actors working? *How do areas of religious significance feature in peacebuilding activities?* *Which different religious identity groups do peacebuilding activities engage with?*	Where will you work? *What areas of religious significance will feature in your peacebuilding work?* *What religious identity groups will you work with?*
WHAT? Factors and issues that are contributing to conflict and peacebuilding	What are your assumptions about what is driving and mitigating the conflict? *What are your assumptions about religion and its role in the conflict?*	What are the context's main political, economic, environmental, social, and cultural characteristics? *What is the relationship between religion, the state, and society?*	What are the driving factors of the conflict? *What dimensions of religion, if any, are involved in driving the conflict?*	What conflict drivers have past and current peacebuilding initiatives addressed? *What religious drivers of conflict are being addressed by existing peacebuilding initiatives?*	What conflict drivers will you address? *What issues will you address that are related to religion?*
WHO? Actors, their characteristics, and their attributes	Who are you and why might you be suited to work in this area? *What is your and your organization's self-defined and perceived religious identity or affiliation?*	Who are the actors with social and political influence? *Who are considered religious actors within the conflict context?* *Who do religious actors have influence over?*	Who are the actors in the conflict and what are the relationships among them? *Which actors are associated with a religious or nonreligious identity?* *How does religion shape relationships among actors?* *Who are the religious actors involved in the conflict?*	Who are the peacebuilding actors and whom are they working with? *Who are the actors initiating or involved with peacebuilding activities?*	Who will you work with? *Which religious actors will you involve in your peacebuilding activities?*

QUESTION TO CONSIDER	STEP 1 Self-Reflect	STEP 2 Understand the Context	STEP 3 Analyze the Conflict	STEP 4 Map Peacebuilding	STEP 5 Turn Analysis into Action
WHY? Motivations: why actors behave the way they do	Why are you getting involved in the conflict? *Why do you think it is important to look at the religious dimensions of the conflict?*	Why are actors from the wider context interested in the conflict? *How are the interests of actors from the wider context shaped by religion?*	Why are the actors engaged in the conflict? *How are the motivations of actors in the conflict shaped by religion?*	Why are actors engaged in peacebuilding? *How are the motivations of peacebuilders shaped by religion? Why are religious actors engaged in peacebuilding?*	Why would actors be motivated to engage in your peacebuilding project? *How do you take into account motivations that are shaped by religion?*
WHEN? The conflict over time	When, and to what extent, can you engage in work on this conflict? *How might religious calendars affect the timing of your efforts?*	When did major historical developments that shaped the context occur? *When were major historical developments shaped by religion?*	When did the conflict start and how has it evolved over time? *What is the role of religion in the conflict over time?*	When have peacebuilding efforts been most successful? *When has religion been involved in previous peacebuilding efforts? How have religious calendars affected past peacebuilding efforts?*	When will the engagement begin and how long will it last? *How might religious calendars affect the timing of your peacebuilding efforts?*
HOW? The use of power and resources to achieve goals	How can you use your skills, resources, and experience to contribute to peacebuilding in this context? *What additional skills, resources, and relationships might you need to engage with the religious dimensions of the conflict?*	How is power and influence exercised in this context? *How does religion contribute to power dynamics?*	How are conflict actors using sources of power and influence in pursuit of their goals? *How is religion a source of power and influence in the conflict?*	How are individuals and organizations attempting to build peace? *How do, or could, the power and resources of religion contribute to building peace?*	How do you plan to reach your goal? *How will religion contribute to your peacebuilding efforts?*

Source: This framework is inspired by the one developed by Lisa Schirch in *Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning* (West Hartford: CT, Kumarian, 2013).

Three Guiding Principles

Three fundamental principles are relevant to conflicts with religious dimensions.

Do no harm: Conflict analysts can have an impact on the conflict. Avoid putting others at risk or making a situation worse, including by over- or underestimating the role of religion in conflict.

Be self-aware: Maintain a self-reflective awareness about your biases and how your own perspective shapes what you see or do not see. Recognize and manage your own judgments when analyzing or engaging actors of different religions, especially if their actions and ways of seeing the world may

be hard to understand or upsetting. Take special care with the use of such labels as "extremist," "fundamentalist," "radical," "spoiler," and "terrorist." These phrases often say as much about the person applying the label as they do about the person being labeled.

Embrace complexity: Analyzing religion's role in conflict will add complexity to your analysis. Welcome this complexity. It will help you understand more deeply the immediate and underlying causes of the conflict, and it will help you decide the area or issue on which to focus your peacebuilding initiative.

Data Collection

Choices about where and how you collect data will affect your conflict analysis and understanding of the conflict. Information, or data, is usually divided into two categories: primary and secondary data.

Primary data is information collected by those carrying out a conflict assessment directly from those in some way involved in the conflict, often face-to-face. Primary data can also be obtained through questionnaires or online communication. Some points to consider in primary data collection:

- Different methods of data collection are likely to be more or less effective depending on who you are talking to.
- Be aware of how cultural and religious factors might affect who is prepared to offer information and which actors are accessible to speak to.
- Engagement with participants outside the immediate area of conflict can help you understand how local issues relate to the broader context.

Secondary data is information that is not collected by you directly, but comes from other sources such as reports, newspaper articles, and previously conducted research. Some points to consider in secondary data collection:

- Broader or more theoretical understandings of the conflict may or may not correspond to the views and perceptions of those directly involved or affected by the conflict.
- Examine secondary sources critically because they are inevitably the products of others' biases.
- When using religious sources as part of your assessment, be mindful of sensitivity around sacred texts or religious authorities, which are often considered indisputable truths.

Data collection should also be:

- **Inclusive:** Analysis is strengthened by bringing in different perspectives. Include inputs from a diverse range of actors (religious and nonreligious), participants, and organizations.
- **Participative:** Getting actors actively involved in collecting information means they will care about the process. A highly participative process can be a peacebuilding tool in itself.

STEP 1 Self-Reflect

Understanding your relationship to the conflict is an important first step in the assessment, analysis, and planning process. In working through the questions in the Quick Reference Table, reflect on:

- **Your experience and knowledge:** Prior knowledge and experience of local religions and culture is a major asset. General knowledge or specific knowledge from a different place does not automatically apply to your local context.
- **Your perceived religious identity:** How your religious identity is perceived will affect how you are viewed and accepted by conflict actors.
- **Your existing preconceptions:** Whether you are religious or secular, your personal perspectives and experiences will shape the way you think about a conflict and possible solutions. Individually and as a team, challenge and test your initial ideas and thoughts about the conflict and the role you perceive religion to be playing.
- **Religious calendars:** Your own religious holidays and festivals can affect your and participants' availability and mobility.
- **Your motivations and constraints:** All conflict analysis and peacebuilding efforts are shaped to some extent by external factors such as funders' conditions and available resources. Be aware of how beliefs, values, and feelings affect your team and its actions.

STEP 2 Understand the Context

Before going into the specifics of the conflict, it is important to have an understanding of the wider context in which the conflict is taking place. Key religion-specific points include:

- **Identity dividers:** When religious identities overlap with other identities such as language, class, and nationality, strong divides may form.
- **Religion and the state:** The relationship between religion and the state is not only about the formal laws governing religion, but also about the values and norms according to which the state is governed.
- **Religious actors:** Which religious actors are influential and what their roles are in society will vary from context to context.
- **The international context:** The transnational nature of religion means the wider regional and international context may be important for conflicts with religious dimensions.
- **Religion in history:** The historical role of religion, and particularly its relation to any colonial past, is key to understanding the present.

In the Analysis Guide, you will find more information on self-reflection and understanding the context, as well as case studies applying these steps of the framework to projects in Chad and Northern Ireland.

STEP 3 Analyze the Conflict

Conflicts are dynamic, complex, and messy. To make sense of them, it is helpful to separate the analysis into different parts (where, what, who, and so on), while keeping in mind that these parts are interrelated. Key religion-specific points include:

- **Sacred spaces:** The religious significance of land needs careful attention in conflicts where land is an important issue.
- **Identity markers and belief systems:** In some conflicts, religious identities are only "labels" that mark different communities that are in conflict, whereas in other conflicts, the differences in beliefs and value systems associated with those identities are themselves drivers of conflict.
- **Understand religious motivations:** Actors may be protecting their religious identity and worldview, promoting their ideas and values, defending the interests of religious institutions, or responding to a spiritual calling.
- **The changing role of religion:** There may be a relationship between the changing role of religion in the conflict over time and the levels of conflict intensity.
- **Dimensions of religion as power:** Religion provides: a rich framework to explain and justify actions in a conflict; an identity around which to mobilize people; an institution with access to material and human resources; a collection of meaningful symbols and practices; and a source of inner strength.

STEP 4 Map Peacebuilding

Mapping peacebuilding means figuring out who is already doing what in terms of peacebuilding. It allows you to cross-check your analysis (how does your analysis compare to that of other peacebuilders?); to identify gaps (what is not being done?); and to learn from success and failure (what is or is not working, and why?). Key religion-specific points include:

- **Peacebuilding participants:** Religious communities are diverse and nuanced. Be specific when mapping which actors are engaged in peacebuilding initiatives and do not limit your analysis to simple or general religious categories.
- **Sacred spaces:** Traditional forms of conflict resolution may be practiced at sites of religious and cultural significance. Analyze how places of religious significance are, or could be, involved in peacebuilding.
- **Religious drivers of conflict:** Peacebuilding actors are often reluctant to engage with religious drivers of conflict. Analyze whether this leaves a gap to be addressed.
- **Religious peacebuilders:** Religious actors, and their existing and potential contributions to peacebuilding, are often overlooked. Include them in your analysis without assuming that their goals and motivations necessarily align with your own.
- **Learn from the past:** Consider what can be learned from past successes and failures, specifically the ways that religion has contributed to peacebuilding.

The Analysis Guide contains more information on conflict analysis and mapping peacebuilding, as well as case studies applying these steps of the framework to conflict in Myanmar and Syria.

STEP 5 Turn Analysis into Action

After you complete the above steps, you will have a strong basis from which to reflect on your potential role in the conflict. Given what you have learned about yourself, the context, the conflict, and what others are doing, is there meaningful action you can take that responds to a real need and adds value to what is already being done? Stay open to the possibility that it may be better not to become involved. If you conclude that you can contribute, you are ready to move from analysis to action.

Putting it all together: Your answers to the questions in the preceding four steps will help you determine the where, what, who, why, when, and how of your own peacebuilding efforts. In the analysis-to-action step, you bring together the knowledge from answering each question (where, what, who, why, when, and how) to develop a proposed peacebuilding plan. For example, to decide where you will engage in peacebuilding, you need to look at what you have learned about where you are well placed to work, where the conflict is taking place, and where peacebuilding initiatives and resources already exist. This process is illustrated in figure 2.

FIGURE 2. **Answer the where, what, who, why, when, and how questions of peacebuilding planning**
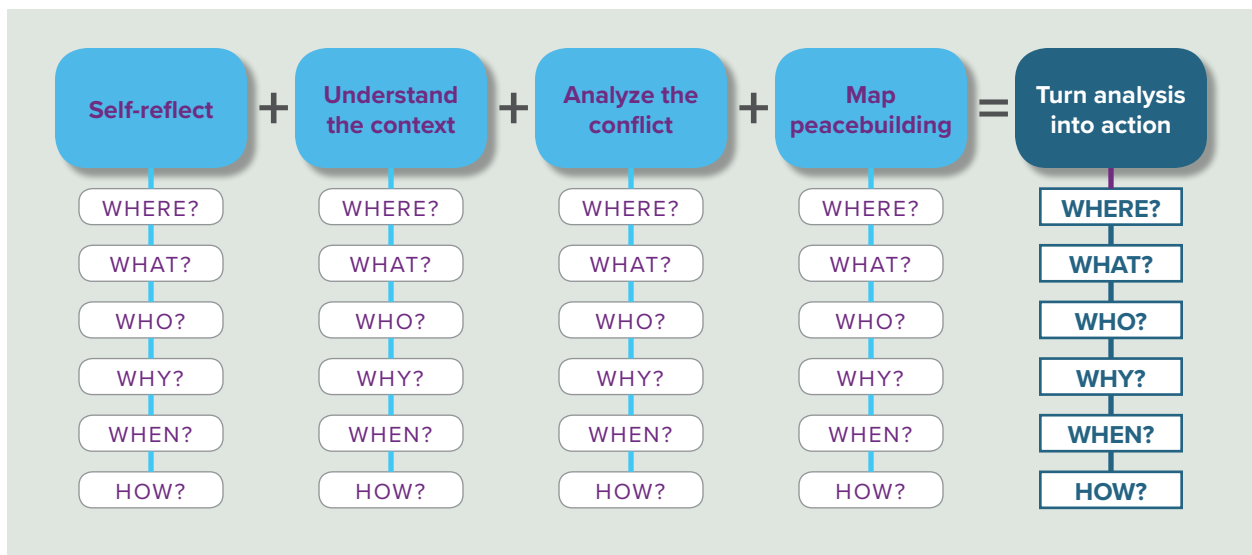
The five dimensions of religion: Remember to consider all five dimensions of religion, thinking carefully about how each one might relate to building peace (see p. 1-2).

Engage religion: Religious actors are often important actors to involve. Be aware of who the key religious actors are and how they can best contribute to peacebuilding. In addition to assessing the contributions from specific religious actors, consider other ways religion could contribute to peacebuilding.

Check your assumptions: Once you have carried out your peacebuilding planning process critically, reflect on how your analysis of religion's role in the conflict informs your efforts. With colleagues and other actors, systematically test the logic of your plan. For more information on developing and testing theories of change, see page 90 in the Action Guide.

Secular and religious peacebuilding: Remember that an individual peacebuilding initiative rarely, if ever, resolves conflict on its own. It can address some issues, but it must be part of a comprehensive and strategic approach to peacebuilding. Understanding and strengthening the links between religious and secular peacebuilding theories and approaches is key. Secular and religious approaches can be undertaken at the same time and often with great impact. Conflicts with significant religious dimensions do not require only religious peacebuilding responses, and those without them do not necessarily require only secular peacebuilding responses.

The Analysis Guide contains more information on designing religion-sensitive peacebuilding initiatives, including monitoring and evaluation, as well as a case study applying this step of the framework to a Buddhist dialogue project in Thailand.

Final Remarks

Many peacebuilding activities look similar. This is not a bad thing. As a peacebuilding community, we have gained knowledge and experience about what works, and it makes sense to take advantage of this learning. Your peacebuilding initiative will be more effective if it takes account of your own strengths and weaknesses, is adapted to the context and the conflict, and builds on the efforts and lessons learned from other peacebuilding activities.